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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07

LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01

SP-02 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /056 W
---------- 041611
R 191059Z SEP 76
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5577
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, UK
SUBJECT: THE TUC CONGRESS - AN EVALUATION

REF: (A) LONDON 14071 (B) LONDON 14183 (C) LONDON 14420
(D) LONDON 14072 (E) LONDON 14182 (F) LONDON 14405

BEGIN SUMMARY. THE 108TH ANNUAL CONGRESS OF THE BRITISH TRADES UNION CONGRESS (TUC) CANNOT BE CHARACTERIZED AS A FIGHTING CONGRESS. IN CONTRAST TO SEVERAL OF FAIRLY RECENT VINTAGE. IT WAS, RATHER, A CONGRESS OF ACCOMMODA-
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TION, COMPROMISE AND RESPONSIBILITY, WHICH WAS DETERMINED

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TO DO NOTHING WHICH WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE DOWNFALL OF THE LABOR GOVERNMENT. THE CONGRESS REAFFIRMED THE SOCIAL CONTRACT, WITH ITS VITAL WAGE GUIDELINES, DESPITE THE DEEP ANXIETY OF MANY DELEGATES ABOUT RISING UNEMPLOYMENT AND PUBLIC EXPENDITURE CUTS, AND IT PAVED THE WAY FOR A PLANNED AND ORDERLY RETURN TO FREE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING WHEN THE PRESENT WAGE GUIDELINES EXPIRE. TO BE SURE, ITS GIFT TO THE LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS STRINGS ATTACHED IN THE FORM OF A SERIES OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEMANDS, BUT IT BROKE LITTLE NEW GROUND IN DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN POLICY. IN THE END, WHEN THE SEAMEN THREATENED TO "VIOLATE" THE SOCIAL CONTRACT, THE TUC LEADERSHIP ACTED SPEEDILY AS VOLUNTARY PATROLMEN DETERMINED TO BRING THAT RECALCITRANT UNION BACK INTO LINE. BUT THE TENSIONS ARE BUILDING UP AND THE 109TH CONGRESS MIGHT POSSLY BE A DIFFERENT SORT OF AFFAIR. END SUMMARY

1. TIME AND TIME AGAIN. LEADING SPEAKERS AT THE TUC CONGRESS HELD IN BRIGHTON SEPTEMBER 6 - 10 DEMONSTRATED THEIR CONCERN FOR THE PROBLEMS FACING THE GOVERNMENT IN ITS EFFORTS TO RESTORE ECONOMIC HEALTH TO BRITAIN. TUC GENERAL SECRETARY LEN MURRAY SUMMED UP THE MOOD: "SO, IF WE CRITICIZE THE GOVERNMENT -- AND WE DO -- IT IS WITHIN THE SHARED DETERMINATION TO CONTINUE OUR COOPERATION TO SOLVE THE NATION'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS." THE TUC. IT WOULD SEEM, DID NOT TRAVEL TO BRIGHTON TO BURY LABOR'S GOVERNMENT. BUT TO PRAISE IT. LEN MURRAY AGAIN CAUGHT THIS MOOD. "ALL IN ALL," HE SAID, "TRADE UNIONISTS HAVE GAINED MORE FROM THIS GOVERNMENT IN THE LAST TWO AND A HALF YEARS THAN FROM ANY OTHER GOVERNMENT IN HISTORY." AND WHEN TOM BRADLEY' WHO IS A TRADE UNIONIST AND A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AS WELL AS CHAIRMAN OF THE LABOR PARTY, TICKED OFF THE RECORD OF THE LABOR GOVERNMENT'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS -- BETTER PENSIONS. FAVORABLE LABOR LEGISLATION, NATIONALIZATION OF THE SHIPBUILDING AND AIR-CRAFT INDUSTRIES, AND OTHER BENEFITS -- THE CONGRESS DULY APPLAUDED. AN AWED CABINET MINISTER PRIVATELY TOLD US LATER: "THEY BEHAVED AS THOUGH THEY WERE PART OF GOVERNMENT." WHAT A SHARP CONTRAST TO THE TUC CONGRESS OF 1973 WHICH BITTERLY ATTACKED THE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT
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AT EVERY TURN. THE CONGRESS SOUGHT TO BE ACCOMMODATING, AND IT WAS.

2. TO A LARGE EXTENT. THE TUC'S REAFFIRMATIOR OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT, WITH ITS VITAL WAGE GUIDELINES, WAS ANTI-CLIMACTIC SINCE THE FIGHT OVER THE SOCIAL CONTRACT HAD ALREADY BEEN JOINED AND SETTLED WHEN THIS CENTER-PIECE OF TUC-GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC STRAGEGY WAS OVERWHELM-

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INGLY APPROVED AT A SPECIAL TUC CONGRESS IN LONDON LAST JUNE. IN THAT SENSE. THE EASY RATIFICATION OF THE SPECIAL CONGRESS DECISION WAS IN THE NATURE OF AN IMPORTANT RITUAL TO BE PERFORMED RATHER THAN A MAJOR DEBATE. THE REAL ARGUMENT WAS ABOUT THE FUTURE -- NEXT JULY 31, TO BE PRECISE. WHEN THE CURRENT WAGE GUIDELINES EXPIRE. AGAIN, THE TUC DEMONSTRATED RESPONSIBILITY. IT OVERWHELMINGLY ACCEPTED THE ADVICE OF THE MODERATE LEADERSHIP WHICH URGED AN ORDERLY AND PLANNED RETURN TO FREE CO/LECTIVE BARGAINING NEXT YEAR RATHER THAN A FREE-FOR-ALL OR UNFETTERED BARGAINING. SIGNIFICANTLY, IT WAS AN OBSCURE LEFT-WINGER FROM A SMALL UNION (BEN RUBNER,

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LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01

SP-02 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /056 W
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R 171059Z SEP 76
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5578
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
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OF THE FURNITURE WORKERS) WHO MOVED A CONTRARY MOTION OPPOSING WAGE RESTRAINT IN ANY FORM. HUGH SCANLON, THE EX-DARLING OF THE LEFT, AND KEN GILL, THE MOST ARTICULATE COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBER OF THE TOP RANKS OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT, TALKED OF OTHER PROBLEMS -- LIKE UNEMPLOYMENT. THUS, WHEN THE TUC AND GOVERNMENT NEGOTIATORS BEGIN THEIR TALKS IN THE SPRING' THE MODERATE RESOLUTION WILL HELP IN SECURING A SAFER RE-ENTRY OF FREE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND PERHAPS THE CONTINUATION OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

SOME FORM OF INCOMES POLICY.

3. THE TUC, HOWEVER, DID NOT LET THE GOVERNMENT COMPLETELY OFF THE HOOK. MANY DELEGATES REFERRED TO THE RECORD-BREAKING UNEMPLOYMENT LEVEL AND SAID. IN EFFECT, THAT THIS CANNOT CONTINUE. MOREOVER, THE CONGRESS REJECTED THE PRINCIPLE THAT BUDGET CUTS CONTRIBUTED TO ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENT AND PROMISED AID TO UNIONS FIGHTING BUDGET CUTS IN THEIR SECTOR. BUT THESE EXPRESSIONS OF TUC DISSATISFACTION APPEARED TO BE MADE MORE IN SORROW AND ANXIETY THAN IN ANGER. THE DEBATE WAS RARELY BITTER. AND WHILE SOME LEADERS WARNED THE GOVERNMENT THAT IT SHOULD NOT TAKE THE TUC FOR GRANTED, EVEN MURRAY PRIVATE-LY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT UNEMOLOYMENT WILL CONTINUE TO RISE FURTHER BEFORE IT GOES DOWN. THE CONGRESS ALSO URGED THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPOSE SELECTIVE IMPORT CONTROLS AND CON-TROL OF CAPITAL MOVEMENTS, BUT FEW OF THE TUC LEADERS VIEW THESE DEMANDS AS MORE THAN A PALLIATIVE.

4. IF THE TUC SEEMS OREPARED TO LIVE WITH DECREASING STANDARD OF LIVING FOR SOME TIME YET, TOGETHER WITH LARGE-SCALE UNEMPLOYMENT, WHAT THEN DOES IT WANT IN RETURN FROM THE GOVERNMENT FOR ITS COOPERATION? AS IT HAS. AT EVERY CONGRESS. THE TUC PRESENTED ITS SHOPPING LIST. JACK JONES STOOD FORTH AS SOMEWHAT OF A PATRON SAINT OF THE OLD-AGE PENSIONERS IN BRITAIN. LEN MURRAY. A MAJOR ARCHITECT OF THE TUC'S PROPOSALS FOR WORKER PARTICIPATION ON THE BOARDS OF UK CORPORATIONS, SPELLED OUT HIS VIEWS AGAIN. CLIVE JENKINS, LESS THE STORMY PETREL THIS YEAR THAN AT OTHER CONGRESSES. CALLED FOR MORE MONEY TO TRAIN WORKERS. AND THERE WERE MANY MORE APPEALS. TOGETHER WITH A DEMAND FOR THE EXPANSION OF THE ECONOMY AND FOR THE CREATION OF A MILLION NEW JOBS DURING THE NEXT THREE YEARS. BUT FEW OF THESE IDEAS WERE NEW

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AND NONE WERE REVOLUTIONARY.

5. NOTHING PARTICULARLY NEW WAS SAID ABOUT INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS EITHER. OLD VILLAINS REAPPEARED: THE GOVERN-MENTS OF CHILE. SOUTH AFRICA. AND ARGENTINA. IMPROVED EAST-WEST RELATIONS CONTINUED TO BE IN FAVOR. AND EXCEPT IN PASSING. VERY LITTLE FAVORABLE OR UNFAVORABLE
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WAS SAID ABOUT THE UNITED STATES -- AOART FROM SOME DISPARAGING REMARKS EXPRESSED BY THE MOVERS OF RESOLUTIONS RELATING TO CHILE AND SOUTH AFRICA. PERHAPS THE ONLY REAL ENTHUSIASM DISCERNIBLE WAS IN JACK JONES' SPEECH MARKING THE DEATH OF GENERAL FRANCO. AND IN THE GREAT WELCOME GIVEN TO THE TRADE UNION DELEGATES FROM SPAIN AND PORTUGAL.

6. IN SHORT, IT WAS AN OBEDIENT. WELL-BEHAVED AND MODERATE CONGRESS WHICH GAVE SUPPORT TO THE GOVERNMENT IT WISHES TO KEEO IN POWER FOR SOME TIME TO COME. DES-PITE THE MARKED ANXIETY ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT, THE MOODOF THE CONGRESS WAS ALSO AMIABLE AND GOOD-HUMORED, AND THE TROTSKYITE, BOB-TAILED, RAG-TAG ARMY OF DEMONSTRATORS AGAINST PUBLIC EXPENDITURE CUTS AND AGAINST HIGH UN-EMPLOYMENT LEVELS WAS PREVENTED BY A LARGE CONTINGENT OF POLICEFROM MARRING THE RELATIVE TRANQUILITY OF THE PROCEEDINGS INSIDE THE CONFERENCE /HALL. URTIL THE SEAMEN DECIDED -- OFF-STAGE AND IN LONDON -- TO STRIKE AND THUS TO THREATEN THE EDIFICE WHICH THE TUC LEADER-SHIP HAD SO CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED, IT HAD BEEN AN UN-EXCITING CONFERENCE. THE SEAMEN'S DECISION GALVANIZED THE TUC LEADERSHIP INTO ACTION AND IT SPENT THE CLOSING DAYS OF THE CONGRESS IN A DETERMINED EFFORT TO GET THE SEAMEN BACK INTO LINE. THE RESULTS OF THESE EFFORTS SHOULD BECOME KNOWN FAIRLY SOON, BUT THERE MAY BE OTHER OCCASIONS WHEN THE HONORABLE GUARDIANS OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT WILL HAVE TO DO VOLUNTARY POLICE WORK. THERE ARE MANY FACTORS -- INCLUDING T/HE STATE OF THE ECONOMY UPON WHOSE IMPROVEMENT THE PARTNERSHIP OF THE TUC AND THE GOVERNMENT DEPENDS -- WHICH WILL DETERMINE THE TENOR AND THE QUALITY OF THE TUC'S 109TH CONGRESS NEXT SEPTEMBER. THE TRADE UNIONISTS COULD POSSIBLY COME OUT FIGHTING ONCE AGAIN. ARMSTRONG

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LABOR UNIONS, MEETINGS, MEETING REPORTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976LONDON14694
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760351-0253
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760944/aaaablsw.tel
Line Count: 270
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 LONDON 14071, 76 LONDON 14183, 76 LONDON 14420, 76 LONDON 14072, 76 LONDON 14182, 76 LONDON 14405
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 APR 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <13 AUG 2004 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

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Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE TUC CONGRESS - AN EVALUATION
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, UK
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006